



Newsletter No. 4

22 December 2012

FSM is proud to announce that, at the Annual conference of the [Australian Skeptics](#) in December, FSM was presented with the award, [Australian Skeptic of the Year 2012](#), in "recognition of their exemplary work in exposing misrepresentations and lack of critical thinking in Australian Universities". The announcement of the award for FSM was written up in [The Age](#) and recognised on [Ockham's Razor](#) (ABC Science Unit) on Radio National.

FSM acknowledges the contributions of *Friends* Prof Ian Frazer & Sir Gus Nossal in the preparation of a [patient guide](#) designed to combat the misinformation around immunisation. Published by the [Australian Academy of Science](#), this will now allow doctors to give parents an easy-to-read guide to the science behind immunisation. The guide was funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing with the support of the AMA. In Australia, [only 1 in 12 babies](#) is fully immunised.

Thanks to your support, FSM – now one year old – is considered a "powerful lobby group".

FSM in the media

FSM is frequently quoted in the press, often correcting misinterpretations of its principles. In his "[Pseudoscience has no place in proper health care](#)", published in *The Australian*, Prof John Dwyer responded to a wide range of inaccurate allegations and inaccuracies made in an opinion article, "[Evidence aplenty for complementary medicines](#)", which claimed that FSM had not only "declared war" but wanted "to remove all complementary medicine courses from universities".

One only has to read the [relevant sections](#) of the FSM website to see that this is a misrepresentation of FSM's advocacy.

What's new since our last Newsletter?

Letters to universities and their responses

While Southern Cross University has not responded to FSM's letters, it told [Australian Doctor](#) in September that it was awaiting the results of a recent external review "to investigate the thoroughness of the science teaching which underpins the complementary therapies being taught at the university".

FSM has sent a second letter to universities, asking them to re-commit to the need for all science teaching to be underpinned by credible scientific data. While some universities were quick to declare that they take this approach, others have still not responded or have done so in ambiguous terms. FSM feels that a third letter will not elicit useful information. The table on the FSM website remains incomplete, but, should any new information emerge, will continue to be updated. FSM remains open to universities, course coordinators or involved staff and students who might wish to provide evidence allowing FSM to correct or update the table.

One of FSM's *Friends*, a medical imaging specialist, was offered a position as a lecturer within a School of Chiropractic. The role involved teaching students how to take X-rays and analyse them to determine chiropractic 'pathologies'. The position was not accepted because of the ethical dilemma of using unnecessarily dangerous radiation.

If you have refused to teach a subject as part of a course you felt was based on pseudoscience, FSM would like to hear about it.

Private health insurance (PHI)

FSM were invited to contribute to the *Review of the Australian Government Rebate on Private Health Insurance for Natural Therapies*. The review was announced in the [2012 Federal Budget](#) and is being undertaken by the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Professor Chris Baggeley.

According to a statement by [Health Minister Tanya Plibersek](#), "The Private Health Insurance Rebate will be paid for insurance products that cover natural therapy services only where the Chief Medical Officer finds there is clear evidence they are clinically effective."

Over 30 natural therapies, including homeopathy, Reiki, aromatherapy, iridology, ear candling, crystal therapy and kinesiology, are mentioned in this review. FSM is delighted by this long-overdue initiative. FSM will submit a document in which the principles of how to

evaluate scientific evidence in the health sciences might help reviewers complete their task. The document we submit will be published on our **FSM** website.

Following the announcement of this review, **FSM** [wrote to the Health Minister](#) suggesting that the project be widened to include acupuncture and chiropractic. The Health Minister's response in November stated, "*at this stage they have no intention to broaden the review*", which is limited to interventions offered by unregistered practitioners.

Australasian Science Magazine

The first articles have now been published in "The Bitter Pill", our regular column in [Australasian Science](#) magazine. This is a subscription-only magazine, but **FSM** has permission to reprint the articles. As they become publicly accessible, they will be posted [on the FSM website](#). **FSM** supporters might consider subscribing to this excellent publication, the only monthly popular science journal in Australasia. **FSM** was delighted to learn that, at the recent conference of The Australian Science Communicators, the editor of *Australasian Science*, Guy Nolph, received the award, "[Unsung Hero of Australian Science Communication](#)". **FSM** congratulates Guy on this well deserved recognition.

Pathology

Many pathologists are supporters of **FSM** and are concerned about the proliferation of pseudo-tests advertised and sold by alternative practitioners and some pathology laboratories. Many of these distinguished and senior pathologists have contributed to the work of a pathology sub-committee established by **FSM** to provide guidelines helping to distinguish these pseudo-tests. The sub-committee is facilitated and chaired by Professor Alastair MacLennan AO, a member of the **FSM** Executive. Some of the unproven and often nonsensical tests of concern to the committee include 'live blood analysis', 'Vega tests', salivary hormone tests and blood type testing to facilitate dieting. Based on the "results" of these tests, therapies, such as supplements or imported unregistered hormones are often sold to the public via the same pathology provider or referrer.

The reputation of the pathology profession and its professional societies is determined not just by its high standards but by the lowest standards they tolerate and allow to continue. Thus, the draft recommendations of the sub-committee have been sent for comment, possible endorsement, and ideally action, to [The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia](#) (RCPA) and to the National Association of Testing Authorities Australia and its [Medical Testing Accreditation Advisory Committee](#). After this process and endorsement by **FSM**, the recommendations will be made public and sent to the Commonwealth Department of Health and appropriate regulatory bodies.

Registered Nurses and the Institute for Science in Medicine

Linda Rosa, RN, is the Executive Director for the [Institute for Science in Medicine \(ISM\)](#).

Our *Friends* who are registered nurses (RNs) received the following email:

"I would like to invite the nurses in FSM and any like-minded nurses to join a private email discussion group for the purpose of keeping in touch about all the many non-science-based practices and policies that have compromised the nursing profession.

My organization - the Institute for Science in Medicine (ISM) - would volunteer to host the group and manage the list mechanics only.

ISM also hosts such a discussion group for dentists/Master of Public Health(MPH) and concerned citizens which has proven quite congenial and successful in working on fluoridation issues".

If you would also like to join either of these groups, **FSM** would be delighted to pass on your request.

Chiropractic

One of our *Friends* has published a [copy of a letter](#) sent to the Chiropractors' Association of Australia (CAA) in June 2012 (and again in October), signed by both the [Tinnitus Association of Victoria](#) and the [Australian Skeptics Inc.](#) The letter refers to a range of claims made on chiropractic websites by practitioners, some of whom were then CAA members. The range of health conditions these website claimed could be treated by chiropractic include tinnitus, ADHD, Asthma, allergies, bedwetting and colic. Six months on, the CAA, the peak body representing chiropractors, has still not responded to the complaint.

Acknowledgments & Congratulations

Congratulations to **FSM** Executive, Prof Marcello Costa, for his new title of "[Matthew Flinders Distinguished Professor](#)". Professor Costa was one of a group of Flinders University's most eminent professors who were honoured with this inaugural award because they "*have demonstrated breadth of achievement and (who) have made an outstanding contribution to their field of scholarship and to Flinders University.*" Professor Costa's citation adds. "*(he) has been a committed teacher of neuroscience to students at all levels and to the general public*". This is their highest honour and is given in exceptional circumstances only.

A big thanks to *Friends* who have had articles published, and/or were in the news or on current affairs programs recently. Please let **FSM** know if you have published any relevant articles and where and when they have appeared.

Recent contributions include:

Dr Rachael Dunlop	Anti-vaccination network told to change its name or be shut down
Prof John Dwyer	Eye of newt and toe of frog (<i>Australasian Science</i>)
	Pseudoscience has no place in proper health care (<i>The Australian</i>)
Prof Edzard Ernst	The risks of homeopathy? (Edzard Ernst)
	The risk of neck manipulation (Edzard Ernst)

	<u>Chiropractic for chronic back pain? Almost certainly not!</u> (Edzard Ernst)
	<u>No negatives please, we are alternative!</u> (Edzard Ernst)
Dr Ken Harvey	<u>TGA, once again, fails to reign in shonky weight loss product</u> (The Conversation)
	<u>Kids Smart's dumb ads: consumers complain of misleading claims</u> (The Conversation)
Prof Chris Del Mar	<u>Is Movember a misguided attempt to do good for middle-aged men?</u> (The Conversation)
Prof Rob Morrison	<u>Testing times for medical science</u> (Radio National (Ockham's Razor))
Prof Ian Musgrave	<u>Homeopathy Gets A Well Deserved Shonky</u> (The Conversation)
	<u>'Toxins' in vaccines: a potentially deadly misunderstanding</u> (The Conversation)
Mal Vickers	<u>RMIT Open Day 2012 -Traditional Chinese Medicine</u> (Victorian Skeptics)
Dr Lewis Williams	Quackademia in the sights of Friends of Science in Medicine Australia (<u>www.insightnews.com.au</u>)

Just a reminder, you can contact us at : <u>info@scienceinmedicine.org.au</u> (email) <u>www.scienceinmedicine.org.au</u> (website)
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